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Workers Inc.

Centres de santé  
des travailleurs (ses)  
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Volume 5 Issue 1

March 2009

# ADVOCATE'S GATEWAY

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW), Sudbury, Ontario

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## AM I AT RISK FOR AN OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE?

In today's society we are constantly receiving information from television, radio, print media and of course, the internet. The information deals with all kinds of ways to live better while identifying various health risks. However, how accurate is the information we are bombarded with and where can we go to verify this information. A good web site for occupational risks is "Haz-Map, Occupational Exposure to Hazardous Agents" a product of the National Library of Medicine in the United States and their Toxicology and Environmental Health Information Program <http://hazmap.nlm.nih.gov/>.

This web site allows you to retrieve information about health related hazards of a particular job, a specific task related to that job or chemical and/or biological agents you may work with. It is easy to use and definitions of unfamiliar terms can be accessed through hyperlinks to a Glossary. You can browse through hazardous agents, occupational diseases, a list of all topics or search by specific agent, disease, job or enter any term and do a text search. If you click on the "More Searches" tab and go to "Non-occupational Activities" then to "By Types of Activities" you have the option of searching non-occupational areas such as Environments, Food & Drugs as well as Hobbies. On the home page is "Haz-Map Help" to aid you in using the site, a "Glossary" and "References" which includes online books, databases and other related links. At any time during your search click on the "Haz-Map" title at the top of the page to return to the home page.

If you are concerned about a specific substance you work with type the name in the search box followed by clicking on "Agents". More than one result can appear so you would choose the most appropriate

one. Information will then be displayed about alternative names, synonyms, description, sources of this agent and uses in various occupations or tasks, comments briefly discussing the occupational disease(s) associated with this agent, adverse effects, toxicity information, diseases associated with exposure and various manufacturing processes that use this agent.

It is also possible to search by "Job" and retrieve a general description, a list of specific tasks associated with this job including links to additional pages for a detailed description.

Searching by "Disease" will tell you if the disease is considered acute or chronic, other names for this condition, a comments section briefly discussing the disease from an occupational standpoint, symptoms, and job tasks associated with the disease and agents which are known to cause the disease.

A text search is useful when you have been unable to find what you are looking for in the other 3 categories. This could be due a lack of information at this time on the topic. It is important to be as specific as possible to reduce the number of results. For example, if you search "prostate cancer" using "Text Search", the results will include all cancers. By using only "prostate" you will get more specific results.

On your search page results you will also find links to other NLM databases. Sometimes the information can be very technical once you leave the Haz-Map site but at this point you should have a better understanding of your concerns and it may be time to discuss them with a professional.

Heather Potvin  
Information Technologist

## VIOLENCE - A NEW WAY OF THINKING

If someone asked if there is a risk of violence in your workplace, what would you say?

You probably associate violence with several high risk jobs - police officers, convenience store clerks, bank tellers and taxi cab drivers and not with your own workplace. You may also think of violence as only involving physical assaults. However, these are not always the case. When it comes to violence in the workplace, there is a new wave of thinking, which may surprise many workers.

Workplace violence frequently gains media attention when it results in death; however, fatalities are only the tip of the iceberg. Violence in the workplace seems to be gaining attention in the field of health and safety. This is not because it is a new hazard; it is a result of its broadening definition.

Dictionary definitions for violence include those acts which, "intend to cause or is causing of injury to persons, animals, or (in limited cases) property," (Wikipedia, 2005). It is described as behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill (Oxford, 2005).

The term violence no longer only applies to those physical attacks that we commonly think of, however, also includes any act in which a worker is threatened or intimidated in their employment. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS, 2005) has reported workplace violence to include the following:

- **Physical attacks** (hitting, shoving, pushing or kicking)
- **Verbal abuse** (swearing, insults or condescending language)
- **Threatening behaviour** (shaking fists, destroying property or throwing objects)
- **Verbal or written threats** (any expression of an intent to inflict harm)
- **Harassment** (any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarms or verbally abuses a person and that is known or would be expected to be unwelcome)

### EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE:

Workplace violence can obviously result in physical injuries, from mild to severe injury and can even be fatal. However, there are other adverse effects that can result from exposure to violence, including psychological trauma. Variations of psychological trauma can include self doubt, depression, fear, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loss of sleep, irritability, affected social relationships, decreased productivity at work and increased absenteeism (AFSCME, 1998 and CCOHS, 2005).

There are also increased costs to an organization that result from increased absenteeism, decreased morale and negative public image. Friends and family members are likely also affected from workplace violence.

### OCCUPATIONS AT RISK:

Anyone can become the victim of workplace violence, but the risks are much greater in certain situations, including working:

- with the public
- with those that are under the influence of medication, drugs or alcohol or have a history of violence or certain psychotic diagnoses
- in workplaces which allow an unrestricted movement of public
- when understaffed or alone late at night
- when handling money, drugs, valuables
- in an enforcement capacity
- in workplaces delivering services, education, advice, care
- where alcohol is served

There are certain occupations that are at an increased risk, including:

- Health care workers
  - Enforcement officers
  - Correctional officers
  - Teachers
  - Retail employees (including gas station and convenience store attendants)
  - Social service workers
- (NIOSH, 1996, AFSCME, 1998, CCOHS, 2005)

### PREVENTION

Employers should ensure that they have an established violence policy in their workplace, outlining management's commitment and procedures for dealing with violence-related issues.

Other methods of prevention should include focus on the following:

- Workplace design (ensuring adequate lighting, security systems and electronic surveillance, restricting access)
- Administrative/Organizational practices (staffing levels, schedules of work, procedures for reporting violence and identifying high-risk people, training workers in conflict)

## VIOLENCE - A NEW WAY OF THINKING CONT'D

resolution and self-defense)

Employers and Joint Health and Safety Committees should ensure the implementation and compliance of a Violence Prevention Program (accessing risks in your workplace, identifying hazards, establishing procedures for handling violence, establishing support services)

Mistakes that commonly occur include:

- Not taking threats seriously
- Believing that it won't happen in your workplace
- Ignoring warning signs
- Not providing appropriate counseling
- Not enforcing disciplinary procedures
- Not enforcing policy and program

It is time for employers and workplaces to realize that *any* type of violence can occur in *any* type of workplace. By implementing procedures to identify and control the hazards, we can work towards minimizing the risk of violence in our workplaces.

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## RSI DAY<sup>PLUS</sup> 2009

Due to inclement weather, RSI DAY<sup>+</sup> 2009 has been delayed until March 23, 2009. Those interested are still able to register. Information about the event can be found on our website at:

[http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/10th\\_Annual\\_RSI\\_DayPlus.html](http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/10th_Annual_RSI_DayPlus.html)

Topics include:

- The Road to Zero - A Prevention Strategy

- Practical Ergonomic Prevention Strategies
- Occupational Injuries from a Medical Perspective
- Indoor Air Quality

If interested in registering please contact Trevor Schell at [tschell@ohcow.on.ca](mailto:tschell@ohcow.on.ca)

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## WHY DO THIS NEWSLETTER....?

In our catchment area, we are hearing from many advocates that they are feeling isolated. In providing this newsletter OHCOW is striving to reduce this isolation, and enhance communication networks amongst advocates and OHCOW. It is

hoped that OHCOW can provide more support to each advocate by providing up-to-date information.

## OHCOW - WHO WE ARE? HOW & WHO CAN WE HELP?

**We're on the web!**  
<http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/>

OHCOW is a valuable occupational health related resource that is available to your members at no cost. The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) were established in 1989 and are funded by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). There are clinics in Hamilton, Toronto, Sarnia, Windsor and Sudbury. Staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of specially trained occupa-

tional health doctors, occupational health nurses, occupational hygienists, ergonomists, researchers, and administrators, each OHCOW clinic provides comprehensive occupational health services and information. Our mandate is the prevention of occupational illnesses and injuries. We do this through the identification of the causes which have led to illnesses and injuries. This also provides us with a window into the workplace.

In order to carry out our work we partner with, among others, pub-

lic health officials; universities; the Ministry of Labour; the Ministry of Health; the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB); and organizations such as cancer coalitions. OHCOW works with medical and nursing schools to, provide occupational education to medical and nursing students. We also work with unions holding clinics for workers about illnesses which they think might be work related. In short, we have the experience, the knowledge and the credibility to assist you.

## DAY OF MOURNING - APRIL 28

One death every 15 seconds – 6000 a day. Work kills more people than wars. Those are the startling conclusions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO estimates that 2.2 million people die from work related causes every year. More than 400,000 deaths are caused by exposure to chemicals. More than 300,000 cancers per year are due to

*Fight for the Living!*  
*Mourn for the dead*

dangerous substances.

In 1984 the Canadian Labour Congress declared April 28 a National Day of Mourning for workers killed and injured on the job. Observances of the day are widespread in Canada. Contact your local union to find out what is going on in your area.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We welcome feedback for generating topics that would be of interest to advocates. Please forward any question or suggested topics to covered in future issues either by e-mail, phone or fax by using the contact information below.

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